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ABSTRACT

By keeping his campaign promises, President Lyndon Johnson transformed the U.S. educational system for the next 30 years. His legislative achievements in education were consistent with his campaign promises and with policy statements stretching back into his career as U.S. Senate Majority Leader. Johnson was a major contributor to the passage of the National Defense Education Act that pushed for the development of more scientists and mathematicians. Through the accounts of those who worked closest with him in the area of education, Johnson was dedicated to the proposition that every child deserved the best education possible, not only for the individual child's sake but for the good of the nation. Lyndon Johnson recognized the close relationship between the quality of the U.S. educational system and its economic health and sought to build up the nation's educational foundation. Lyndon Johnson's successful efforts to secure educational legislation created a dramatic shift in the focus of educational policy making in the United States and resulted in an expansion of the educational system in terms of both goals and constituencies. Contains 50 references. (CK)

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Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Presidential Election Campaign of 1964: A Case Study of Presidential Leadership for Education

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Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Presidential Election Campaign of 1964: A Case Study in Presidential Leadership for Education

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Theodore H. White, chronicler of American presidential campaigns, has described the 1964 race as "that rare thing in American political history, a campaign based on issues."[1] To Lyndon Johnson--- Texan, Southerner and Democratic candidate for President of the United States--- one issue was paramount. That issue was education. In campaign stops around the country during that summer and fall nearly thirty years ago, Johnson reaffirmed his vision of the importance of education to the individual, to the national security and to the economic future of the country. And he offered solutions to the problems of education in the 1960's, solutions that as President he was able to translate into legislation which dramatically enhanced the role of the federal government in education. By 1969, when he left office, the more than 60 pieces of legislation bearing his signature had decisively shifted the locus of control in educational policy making from state and local officials to the federal government and had significantly expanded the educational system itself. However history may finally judge Lyndon Johnson's Presidency, he had earned the right to be called "The Education President".

In the traditional American value system, "education" assumes a position of semi-religious proportion. Lyndon Johnson shared that traditional view and spoke of it often.[2] Recounting tales of his early life and the part education played in his escape from poverty was one of Johnson's favorite campaign stories. But by 1964, his discussion of education had evolved from the typical generic deference traditionally expected of American political figures. Instead, the President proclaimed education to be the essential tool required to bring to fulfillment his vision of what America could become, the "Great Society." Johnson himself described his decision to make education a campaign issue in these words:

> As a young schoolteacher...I had represented the teachers before the Texas Legislature, urging that cigarette tax revenues be used for raising the income level of teachers to that of skilled workmen. I knew what "school" meant for hundreds of thousands of boys and girls: crowded facilities, double shifts, overworked and often undertrained instructors. I knew that unless the federal government could step in and render necessary assistance, many American children would be doomed

> to inferior education, which presaged an empty future. Not only would those children suffer but so would their country.
>
> Because of these convictions, I made a personal decision during the 1964 Presidential campaign to make education a fundamental issue and put it high on the nation's agenda. I proposed to act on my belief that regardless of a family's financial condition, education should be available to every child in the United States---as much education as he could absorb. I had no intention of walking away from this fight.[3]

In taking this course, the President acted contrary to the advice of some of his advisors, leary of alienating voting blocks of Roman Catholics and conservative Southern Democrats. On this issue, however, Johnson held firm.

Lyndon Johnson became the first American Presidential candidate to give education a high priority on the nation's agenda. One biographer notes :

> His [Johnson's] social scheme, labeled "The Great Society", proposed to use teaching and learning in addition to legislation to ensure equal justice, to provide equal opportunity, and to increase the gross national product so that a larger eononmic pie could be split by all, regardless of age, color, creed or national origin.[4]

Johnson was not, of course, the first American politician to express the hope that education could reshape the social, political and economic landscape of the country. That dream may be as old as America itself. But because of a unique combination of family background, personal experience, firmly held conviction and political acumen, Lyndon Johnson was able to give the dream substance.

Like many Americans, Lyndon Johnson believed fervently in education as a pathway to advancement and prosperity for the individual. But he was also convinced that America needed a strong educational system to maintain its national security and to strengthen the country internally. Vice Presidential running mate Hubert H. Humphrey described Johnson's faith in education this way:

> Johnson was---to put it frankly, he was a nut on education. He felt that education was the greatest thing he could give to the people; he just believed in it, like some people believed in miracle cures.[5]

Humphrey was not alone in this assessment. Presidential aide Douglass Cater, who authored the education message of January, 1965 and who served as point man for education legislation in the early days of the Eighty-ninth Congress, noted that Johnson's interest in education was "genuine" and that the President was "...always urging me to bigger and bolder ideas in the education field."[6]

Biographers have speculated on the origins of Lyndon Johnson's near evangelical belief in education. The most commonly accepted explanation is that his commitment can be traced to the influence of his mother, Rebecca Baines Johnson. Well-educated herself and a member of a central Texas family prominent in religious, literary, and education circles (Grandfather Baines had been the second president of Baylor University), Rebecca Johnson never tired of reminding her first son of the importance of an education if one wanted to be someone in life---and she expected him to be someone.[7] But Johnson was also deeply influenced by the politics of his father. Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr. was a Democrat with strong populist leanings and a long time member of the Texas legislature As a youngster, Johnson spent much time seated on the back porch and at the kitchen table of the family home in Johnson City listening to his father and his cronies discuss the politics of the day. As he grew older, Johnson accompanied his father on campaign swings through the Texas Hill Country and served several legislative sessions working as his father's page on the House floor in Austin. Very soon, he began to take on not only Sam Ealy Johnson's sartorial and physical habits, but also his political viewpoints.[8] While some biographers have attributed Johnson's educational rhetroic to a crass political opportunism, it is more likely that he never completely outgrew his mother's early admonitions or his fathers populist convictions.[9]

Early Efforts: 1950-1963

While Johnson voiced his faith in education early and often in his political career, his conviction that education should play a significant role in national security and in the economic welfare of the country emerged out of his growing prominence as a national rather than regional political figure during the 1950's. A Southern Democrat first elected to Congress in 1937, Johnson's early positions on education and the federal government's role in promoting it was typical of his region and time. It was his election as Senate Majority Leader in 1955, however, which gave Johnson national exposure and a national stage and which may have compelled him to

look beyond the confines of Texas and the South, not only on the question of education, but on other issues as well. Johnson's use of using education as an instrument through which to attain broader national goals began to emerge early in the 1950's and became more prominent throughout his years as Senate Majority Leader, Vice President and ultimately President of the United States.

Johnson publically connected education with the national interest, in this case national defense, in 1951,[10] but his first major speech on the subject was delivered on the Senate floor in the summer of 1957. Calling for an "Open Curtain" rather than the Iron Curtain that separated East from West, Johnson argued for better understanding between the citizens of the United States and the citizens of the Soviet Union. He proposed that the two Cold War rivals engage in radio and television exchanges between their leaders and in exchanges of scholars working on non-military projects. In an age of atomic weapons, said the Senator, unless we open "the eyes, ears and minds of all peoples of the world", mankind could return to "the caves of our ancestors and burrow underground like the prairie dogs of West Texas".[11] Getting to know one another through open exchanges of information was infinitely preferable to conflict on an atomic battlefield.

Johnson also became a vocal supporter of federal aid to school districts unable to meet rapidly rising costs for additional classrooms and teachers. Again in 1957, Johnson told his senatorial colleagues that public schools were "in grave peril" because of the strain placed on their budgets by rising expectations and costs. Some districts floated bond issues to supply needed classroms and other facilities, but the interest on those bonds was rising "25% faster than the direct general expenditures for education".[12] Congress was already extending aid to school districts impacted by the location of military bases and other defense intallations, but that assistance went to only a few school districts. Too many other school districts were finding their budgets stretched to the breaking point and were unable to cope. School children and the nation itself were suffering and the Senator from Texas called on the federal government to extend its power and resources to help.

While it is probable that Johnson's positions on radio and television exchanges and federal aid for schools laboring to meet rising costs were largely determined by personal and state interests, his reaction to the events of October 4, 1957 was not. This was the day the Soviet

Union launched a softball-sized satellite called "Sputnik" which circled the earth for an hour and a half. Americans paniced. Suddenly, the country's assummed superiority in science and technology was being challenged and by its deadliest rival. The public began to pose some pointed questions and both politicians and educators were placed on the defensive.

Johnson's immediate reaction to the Soviet achievement was measured and relatively low key. Speaking to the Dallas Chapter of the American Jewish Committee in November of 1957, the Texas Senator offered his audience a reassuring message.[13] Rather than something to be feared, the flight of the Soviet satellite was an event to be celebrated, for it represented "one of the greatest feats in the whole history of mankind." Humanity had taken its first steps away from the earth. American schools would have to meet the challenge, not only by upgrading science instruction and turning out more mathematicians and physicists, but also by rekindling what Johnson called an "enthusiasm for learning." The Senator was confident that the challenge could and would be met.

Speaking the following month at an "LBJ Appreciation Day," the Senate Majority Leader outlined his views of what needed to be accomplished legislatively in 1958.[14] Johnson restated his conviction that the Soviet achievement was not a cause for hysteria. But neither could Americans be complacent or view the Soviet scientific feat as a fluke Rather, America must take a "cold, hard look at the situation and determine effective, prudent steps that will assure our future." There were four steps, Johnson believed, that needed to be taken to secure the country's lead in science and technology. First, scientists who were already working on national security should be supported in their research efforts. Second, American scientists should work ahead rapidly, but without waste. Third, the nation must set new goals for education and lastly, new and innovative ways of teaching all subjects, including math and science, must be found. Johnson was prepared to set these priorities into legislation when Congress convened in January.

Others were also active in seeking to improve America's position in science and technology through education. President Eisenhower appointed two major committees to study the situation and make recomendations. The first was the White House Conference on Education, chaired by Neil McElroy. This committee conducted a series of local, state and national meetings which ultimately involved several thousand people. A President's Committee on Education Beyond High School, chaired by Joseph Devereux Colt, was also active. Not to be upstaged by the Executive

Branch, Congress too got into the act. The House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor held extensive hearings and in the Senate, Johnson's own Subcommittee on Preparedness looked into the educational implications of Sputnik. The groundwork for a serious effort to provide federal aid to education was being laid.

The Majority Leader greeted the Senate on the opening of the first session of the Eighty-fifth Congress with the assurance that some federal aid to education legislation must be passed. There was, he told the assembled senators, no better defense for the United States than "trained and educated minds."[15] Indeed, Johnson had a specific bill in mind, H.R. 13247, popularly called the National Defense Education Act. This piece of legislation proposed to train American scientists and mathematicians by providing fellowships to students working in these critical areas. The intent of the legislation was clear and, in Johnson's view, ought to be acceptable to liberals and conservatives alike. But he had miscalculated and the bill stirred significant controversy.

Two issues stalled NDEA in Congress that winter and spring. An amendment to the legislation put forth by Karl Mundt (R. N. D.) called for individuals and organizations receiving federal dollars to sign loyalty oaths. This provision stirred such vigorous opposition from academicians and civil libertarians that Johnson was forced ultimately to refuse to bring the measure to a vote on the Senate floor during that session of Congress.[16] Congressional conservatives were also concerned that the bill would result in federal control of education, a contention of long standing with opponents of federal aid. In the House, Representative Ralph Gwinn (R New York) was particularly active in pressing this argument, targeting the policies and practices of the U. S. Office of Education. Some conservatives also expressed the belief that the "crises" in education was being manufactured specifically to enhance the federal role.[17] Unable to resolve these controversies, Congress recessed without passing NDEA.

Matters went much more smoothly when Congress reconvened. Spearheaded by Johnson friend and colleague Mike Mansfield (D. Montana), the National Defense Eduation Act won acceptance. Mansfield's most effective tactic was to inundate his colleagues with statistics proving that the United States lagged far behind the Soviet Union in science, technology and related fields. Mansfield noted that only one in three American high school students took a chemistry course; one in four attempted a physics course; and only one out of eight enrolled in trigonometry or

solid geometry. High schools themselves came in for some unfavorable comments. In 1957 100,000 seniors had graduated from high schools where no advanced math was taught; sixty-one thousand attended high schools where neither physics or chemistry were offered; and fourteen states permitted students to graduate without a single required course in science or math.[18] In comparision, Soviet requirements were much more stringent. The weight of statistics, plus the inclusion in the bill of a disclaimer that nothing in the act empowered the federal government to control the administration, personnel or curriculum of any educational institution or school system, won passage for the bill. Ultimately, however, the National Defense Education Act was approved because it tied education directly to the security of the United States. The point was not lost on Lyndon Johnson.

While Johnson received much of the credit for the passage of the National Defense Education Act others contributed significantly. President Eisenhower, usually lukewarm on the issue of federal aid to education, finally came out in support of an amended NDEA. But the problems of American education in the late 1950's and early 1960's went far beyond the need for more scientists and mathematicians. These were turbulent times for American education. Begining in 1954, the number of students crowding American schools began to expanded yearly, creating a demand for more teachers and new classroom space Urban schools especially were staggering under an influx of poor and undereducated blacks from the South, migrating North and West in search of better lives. Moreover, technological innovations, advances in communications and the ease of disseminating new discoveries in the natural and behavioral sciences created a knowledge explosion which put a strain on curricula.[19] Public schools were simply unable to adjust quickly enough on their own.

The 1950's was a turbulent decade for American education. Critics from both the anti-communist right and from prestigious academic circles were vocal. Conservatives continued to demand loyalty oaths for institutions and individuals receiving federal education a dollars and to decry the intrusion of the federal government into what they considered to be a purely local governmental activity. At the same time, noted scientists and academicians were critical of the quality of education being provided the typical American high school graduate. James Bryant Conant[20], former President of Harvard University, lamented the state of high school curricula and teacher training; Arthur Bestor[21], philosopher and historian, described American schools as a vast "educational wasteland"; Admiral Hyman Rickover[22], father of the nuclear sub-

marine, was biting in his denunciation of the quality and quantity of science instruction in the schools. But overriding all other issues in terms of long-standing importance were questions of educational deprivation based on race and socioeconomic factors. The elimination of legal segregation in the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education case had revealed the miserable education typically provided for black children and the need for assistance in improving the quality of education for this segment of the population. But large pockets of poverty also existed in predominately white rural areas as well as in the black inner cities. For members of both races, lack of educational opportunity produced disparities of income and restricted employment options.[23] Sociologist Michael Harrington argued that much of the American population was not only poor, but was trapped in what he called a "cycle of poverty"[24] Change was obviously needed and astute politicians listened carefully.

Following the passage of NDEA, Johnson introduced other eduation bills, including one that would provide low cost loans to students and a bill to provide special training in government for exceptional students. Johnson also gave his support to a bill introduced by fellow Texas and political rival Ralph Yarborough to establish a Foreign Service Academy to train the best and brightest young Americans to serve their country abroad.[25] Neither of these measures proved successful.

As the decade of the 1950's ended, SenatorJohnson summed up his position on education and the national welfare. Speaking in San Antonio, the Senator told the Texas State Teachers Association that America would not have the schools it needed until:

> we have the national purpose we need. Dynamic education can exist only if our goal is a dynamic society, a dynamic economy and a dynamic role of world leadership.
>
> Our response to the needs of education...has been handicapped by those who have sought to barter adequate schools for other objectives....Thus issues like integration or religion or taxation or many more have impeded our acceptance of responsibility. The needs of education must not be used as barter.
>
> The needs of the nation must put first things first. We must meet the needs of education without allowing our differences in other areas to blight our responsibility....[26]

Education should be placed first on the national agenda because the country and the free world

required it and nothing like petty political differences should impede the construction of the finest educational system in the world. It may have been pure politics, but the asembled teacher delegates loved it.

Nineteen-sixty saw a dramatic shift in Lyndon Johnson's sphere of operation. Unsuccessful in his bid for the Democratic Presidential nomination, Johnson accepted a place on the national ticket as Vice Presidential candidate. The Democratic victory in November took Johnson from a position of power as Senate Majority Leader to a position of relative ineffectualness as Vice President of the United States. Now, as presiding officer of the Senate, he could only observe the body in which he had played so commanding a role for many years. From the Senate Chair Johnson lent as much support as possible to John F. Kennedy's legislative program, including major education bills in 1961 and in 1963. Both pieces of legislation failed because of the Kennedy team's inability to put together a coalition to overcome opposition to federal aid from Roman Catholics and Southern Democrats.[27] When John F. Kennedy left for Texas in November, 1963, he had yet to pass a significant federal aid to education measure.

Events in Dallas altered the course of history for all Americans and put Lyndon Johnson squarely back in the seat of power. Vowing to continue the Kennedy legacy in legislation, including education, Johnson went to work with a vengence. Between December, 1963 and February, 1964, Congress enacted six pieces of legislation which either directly or indirectly impacted education. Enacted into law were:

- The Higher Education Facilities Act, which assisted two- and four-year colleges in constructing classrooms, laboratories and libraries to meet expanding enrollments.

- The Vocational Education Act, which expanded and improved vocational educational opportunities in the United States.

- The Manpower Development and Training Act, which offered matching grants to the states to provide basic literacy training to the hard core unemployed.

- An expansion of the Library Services and Construction Act of 1956.

- The Juvenile Delinquincy and Youth Offenses Control Act, which funded demonstration projects in the states for the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency and to train specialists in prevention

and control.

- The Economic Opportunities Act which, in addition to other provisions, created the Job Corps, a Work-Training Program for unemployed youth a Work-Study Program, which enabled students to attend college and various community initiated programs.

The Civil Rights Act, passed by congress in June of 1964, must also be considered part of Johnson's contribution to educational change. The law impacted American life in a number of different areas, including employment, voting rights and public accommodations. It also had major implications for education. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act empowered the federal government to withhold funds from any public institution which excluded or denied benefits to any person on the basis of race, color or national origin. Since most public schools, colleges and universities were already receiving substantial federal dollars through the National Defense Education Act and the National Science Foundation, the threat of witdrawal of these funds because of racial discrimination was a powerful impetus to change. Title VI also gave the attorney general of the United States the authority to initiate legal action against school systems which failed to comply with the Brown decision. While some authorities discount the effect of Title VI on the actual integration of the schools, there is little doubt that the powers granted under it did much to strengthen the control of the federal government over education, at least in the area of race relations.

If we examine Lyndon Johnsons speeches and statements on public education during his political career up to November, 1964, a variety of themes reoccur. These include beliefs that:

- education is a prerequsite for freedom.
- education is the best way to escape the cycle of poverty.
- there should be equal access to educational opportunities for all.
- the teacher's role is central to education.
- America is in the midst of an educational crisis.
- opportunities for higher education must be expanded. .
- educational opportunities for special groups must be provided.[28]

These themes would be woven into the context of much of Johnson's campaign rhetoric as he

competed for the presidency in his own right in the fall of 1964.

The Campaign of 1964

Although Johnson did not receive the nomination of his party until August, the general tenor of his Presidential campaign was set in an address delivered in the sunshine of an Ann Arbor, Michigan afternoon in May. The occasion was the annual commencement exercise for the University of Michigan and a crowd of over 90,000 was gathered as the President rose to accept an Honorary Doctor of Civil Laws Degree. Written by Richard Goodwin[29], but approved and edited by Johnson himself, the "Great Society" speech gave Lyndon Johnson the chance to explain the philosophical groundwork of his Presidency and his vision of the future.[30] But more importantly, his speech and the setting in which it was delivered allowed Johnson to appear at his most presidential. The "Great Society" speech went far to establish Lyndon Johnson's stature as a leader in his own right.

Johnson told the graduates and their families that America had become a land of wealth, prosperity and power. But Americans could not be complacent in their prosperity and abundance because serious inequities existed. Rather, in the second half of the twentieth century, America was to be challenged to face serious problems and to create the "Great Society." Americans themselves would determine "whether we have the wisdom to use...wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of American Civilization."

> The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time... The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents...It is a place where man can renew contact with nature...It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods...But most of all, the Great Society is not a safe harbor, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor.

The President focused on three venues in which to build the Great Society: in the cities, in the countryside and, especially, in the classroom:

> Our society will not be great until every young mind is set free to scan the farthest reaches of thought and imagination. We are still far from that goal.

> Today, 8 million adult Americans...have not finished 5 years of school. Nearly 20 million have not finished 8 years of school....Nearly 54 million...have not even finished high school....Each year more than 100,000 high school graduates, with proved ability, do not enter college because they cannot afford it....In many places classrooms are overcrowded and curricula outdated. Most of our qualified teachers are underpaid , and many of our paid teachers are unqualified. So we must give every child a place to sit and a teacher to learn from. Poverty must not be a bar to learning and learning must offer an escape from poverty.
>
> But more classrooms and more teachers are not enough. We must seek an educational system which grows in excellence as it grows in size. This means better training for our teachers....It means exploring new techniques of teaching, to find new ways to stimulate the love of learning and the capacity for creation.[31]

The speech took twenty minutes to deliver and the applause continued for another fourteen minutes.[32] It seemed that Johnson had struck a responsive cord in his hearers.

The President returned to the the subject of education on June 20th. Speaking at the dedication of the new campus of the University of California at Irvine, Johnson reiterated his theme that education and national well-being were tied inexorably together. After reviewing California's critical need for more teachers and classroom space in the coming years, Johnson told his hearers:

> You will not be alone. Education is a national need, and I want to assure you that as long as I am President, the education of your children is going to receive top priority by the men who lead your Nation.
>
> All our hopes for peace depend on the kind of society we build here in the United States. And that, in turn---the kind of society we build---rests on our system of education. I do not intend for us to settle for an uneasy peace for the world, or an inferior society for America, or an inadequate education for our children.[33]

The President reiterated his belief in education as a way to solve national problems in remarks to a group of 300 school superintendents and other state and local officials meeting in the East Room of the White House on July 30:

> We are what we are in this land of ours---and what we have become in the rest of the world---because we have placed our faith as a nation in public education.

> Onto my desk each day come the problems of 190 million men and women. When we consider those problems, when we study them, when we analyze them, when we evaluate what can be done, the answer almost always cones down to one word: education. This is true for economic problems, this is true for social problems. This is true for the challenges of peace as well as for the challenges of preparedness.
>
> The simple and sure truth of our times is that America in this decade must enlarge, must broaden, must deepen its committment to the classroom as the central core of our society and of our succcess.[34]

Johnson returned to the theme of education's critical importance in an address to the 200th Anniversary Convocation of Brown University in September. Here he combined the twin themes of the expansion of knowledge and the idea that education was " a cure for the ills of this age."

> At the desk where I sit in Washington, I have learned one great truth: the answer for all our national problems, the answer for all the problems of the world, comes down, when you really analyze it, to one single word: education.
>
> Knowledge promises to be our salvation, and we must seek after it, and we must nurture its growth, and we must spread it, spread it among all our people so that each of them can have some or it.
>
> We must also make certain that there is no neglect or no compromise of the American devotion to democracy of educational opportunity. Because universal, free public education is the very foundation upon which our entire society rests today....[35]

Lyndon Johnson conceptualized education as the key to America's future development as a society and as something to be valued both for its own sake and for its contribution to the strength and security of the nation. The doors of America's schools and colleges must be open to any and all, regardless of family background, wealth or, he might have added but did not, race. "Democracy of educational opportunity" was a concept which he applied to all Americans.

But what did he, as President, intend to do to strenghten the educational foundation on which society rested? Part of the answer came during a campaign stop in Denver on October 12th.[36] Johnson laid out for his listeners the five steps he believed were necessary to strengthen public education, which he called the "...bedrock issue in this campaign." He began by drawing the expected contrast between himself and his Republican opponents. They say, the President asserted, that "[t]he child has no right to an education" . But as far as he was concerned, "...every child has the right to as much education as he or she has the ability to take." A good

education was important not only to the child and his or her parents, but also for the good of the nation: "...nothing can mean more to the future of America."

The President told the Columbus Day crowd:

> Tonight, 40 million students are enrolled in our public schools in America; 5 million more students will enter by the end of this decade. And we must be ready for them. Unless we act now 1 out of every 3 students now in the fifth grade will drop out before they finish high school---1 out of 3. And 4 out of 5 juvenile delinquents between 15-18 years old---4 out of 5---are school dropouts.
>
> During the last 10 years, jobs filled by high school graduates increased 30 percent. Jobs for those without high school diplomas dropped 25 percent.

The task of rebuilding America's schools would be formidable. Telling the Coloradans that "I intend to put education at the top of America's agenda", Johnson proceeded to detail the country's needs as he saw them: 660,000 new classrooms and 200,000 new teachers in the next four years "just to keep up."; an "all-out effort" to improve schools in city slums and poor rural areas; programs to "expand and enrich" the nation's colleges and universities to meet an enrollment that would "double in the next 10 years"; incentives to encourage adults to "go back and get the schooling they need to keep up with technology so that they can continue to be taxpayers and not...be taxeaters"; and control of the schools must be kept in the hand of the people, where Johnson promised it would remain "as long as I am President."

This was the program the President offered, more classrooms and teachers, better schools for the urban and rural poor, expanded opportunities for a college education, adult education to maintain productivity and "local control" of the schools. Neither Johnson nor his audience seemed to take notice of the contradiction of maintaining the local control of schools in the face of what was obviously to be a massive insertion of the federal government into educational policy making. Nor did the President explain precisely how his program was to be accomplished, how much it would cost or who was to pay for it. Such details were to be left for after the election.

Johnson's final statement of his proposals to improve America's schools came on November 1, two days before the election.[37] In a series of Presidential Policy papers released on that date, Johnson addressed the issues of health, conservation of natural resources and farm policy. But Policy Paper No. 1 was devoted to education. In the text of this document, Johnson touched on

many of the points he had raised during the campaign: the right of every child to an education, America's need for educated men and women to keep it strong and secure, the cost in human and financial terms of the drop out problem, equality of educational opportunity and the priority of education on the national agenda. If elected, the President promised legislation designed to:

- Broaden and improve the quality of the school base by providing more teachers and classrooms and by offering incentives to attract the best people to the teaching profession.
- Concentrate teaching resources in urban slums and rural poverty areas.
- Expand and enrich opportunities for a college education.
- Recognize that education is a lifelong process, and a need of adults as well as of school-age children.
- Strengthen state and local education systems to maintain the tradition of control at the local level.

Appealing to conservatives, Johnson concluded his statement with a quote from the late Senator Robert A. Taft, which probably had the shade of the late Republican Senator from Ohio and former Johnson adversary snapping its teeth and sucking its breath, a characteristic Taft reaction when irritated. Taft had once said:

> Education is primarily a State function---but in the field of education, as in the fields of health, relief and medical care, the Federal Government has a secondary obligation to see that there is a basic floor under those essential services for all adults and children in the United States.

"Every President from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to John Fitzgerald Kennedy worked to build that floor", concluded the President and pledged, "... I plan to get on with the task."

Johnson awaited the results of the November 3rd balloting in one of his favorite retreats, Austin's Driskell Hotel. He did not have long to wait. By early evening, it was clear that Lyndon Johnson would be the first Southerner elected President of the United States in over a century. Not only had he won, but he had come very close to matching the 1936 victory of his idol and early mentor Franklin Delano Roosevelt.[38] The final tally showed that the President outpolled Senator Goldwater by over 16 million votes. Moreover, Johnson carried every state in the Union but six, all in the South and Southwest and would receive 486 electoral votes to

Goldwater's 52.[39] Equally satisfying to the thoroughly partisan President was the size of his victory, which meant that an overwhelming number of new Democrats would be going to Washington and that the President's party would control both the House and the Senate. Twenty-eight new Democratic Senators and 295 new Democratic Congressmen gave Lyndon Johnson command of the Congress as he attempted to build his "Great Society."[40] It was a sweet victory.

Translating Rhetoric into Law

Following the election, the President retired to his ranch ninety miles from Austin for some rest and relaxation. But there was business to be accomplished, too. Johnson began a round of discussions with cabinet officers regarding legislative and budget proposals for the "Great Society" programs. During the Thanksgiving weekend, the President met with Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Anthony Celebrezze and Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, H. E. W. Assistant Secretary Wilbur Cohen, Education Commissioner Francis Keppel, staff aides Bill Moyers and Douglass Cater and with William Cannon, Chief of the Education, Manpower and Science Division of the Bureau of the Budget. Johnson reviewed the report of the Gardner Task Force and approved preliminary bill drafts from the U. S. Office of Education. He paid particular attention to plans for the first piece of education legislation to be sent to Congress, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and instructed Moyers to crank up the necessary legislative and budget preparations for introducing the bill to Congress.[41] During the conferences, Johnson set target dates of January 12 for the special message on education, which he directed Cater to draft, and January 25 for submission of the budget, detailing his plans for education spending in the next fiscal year. The President intended to hit the floor running when Congress arrived back in the nation's capitol.

Lyndon Johnson expected support for education to be a priority for all segments of his administration, a position he clearly stated during a Cabinet meeting on January 11, 1965. After making sure that the text of the education message had been cleared through key congressional leaders, especially Wayne Morse in the Senate and Edith Green in the House, Johnson addressed the Cabinet on the role he expected them to play in promoting his education initiative:

> Tomorrow I am sending to the Congress the Message on Education, to outline our educational program for this year. That is why I called you here today.

> I want, and I intend, education to be the cornerstone on which we build this administration's program and record. Whatever the province of your department or agency, I consider your first responsibility to be support of education--- not merely the legislation, but the cause of education itself.
>
> Not only for the good of the individual, but for the greater good of the nation, I hope we can this year commit the nation to the proposition that every American, regaredless of race, religion or family background must be given all the education his abilities can use, and that the education must not be merely average, but excellent.[42]

As promised Congress received the President's Special Message on January 12. In the message Johnson called on the Congress to join him in declaring a national goal of "Full Educational Opportunity". To accomplish this goal, the President outlined four major tasks: better education for disadvantaged youth who needed it most; the best of educational equipment and innovations to be placed within the reach of all students; advances in the technology of teaching and the training of teachers; and incentives for life-long learning. To pay for the programs, the President asked Congress to appropriate $1.5 billion in new funds for fiscal 1966. "This expenditure" he asserted, "is a small price to pay for developing our nation's most priceless resource." Specifically, the message called for Congress to provide:

- $150 million for pre-school projects under the Community Action Program of the Economic Opportunity Act.
- $1 billion to provide assistance to public elementary and secondary schools serving children of low income families.
- legislation to authorize the purchase of library books for school libraries and for student use in public and private non-profit elementary schools.
- federal grants for supplementary education centers and services within communities.
- the establishment of regional educational laboratories to undertake research, train teachers and implement tested research findings.
- a program of grants to state educational agencies.[43]

For higher education, Johnson proposed programs to provide scholarships for qualified and needy high school graduates, to strenghten smaller colleges through faculty exchanges and other faculty development activities, legislation to purchase books for small college libraries, grants to institutions of higher education for training of school, college and community librarians and

grants for training teachers and handicapped children .

Johnson's proposals were enacted into law in 1965, first in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P. L. 89-10) and secondly in the Higher Education (P. L. 89-329). Of the two, it was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (technically the Morse-Perkins Act) which had the most significant and long lasting impact.[44] ESEA contained five titles. The most important, Title I, allocated $1.06 billion dollars for programs of assistance for children of poor and disadvantaged families in both local public school districts and in parochial schools. Title II provided $100 million for school library resources, textbooks and other materials, also available to both public and parochial schools. Title III established supplementary education centers and services such as academic enrichment, guidance and counseling, health services and remedial instruction. Title IV supported cooperative research programs sponsored by universities and state departments of education and Title V provided funds to assist state departments of education .[45] In its first fifteen months, ESEA distributed an average of $40,000 to some 25,000 school districts in the United States to be spent on the educationally disadvantaged.[46]

Conclusion

Several biographers of Lyndon Johnson are critical of one or more aspects of his character and career, perhaps justifiably so. The long term effectiveness of many of the programs he initiated have also been questioned.[47] Read from the perspective of the 1990's, many of Johnson's pronouncements on education and its role in solving social problems sound naive and simplistic. Yet, given his personal background and the political context of his time, Johnson's leadership in making education a national priority is without question. By all accounts of those who worked closest with him in this area, Johnson was firmly and sincerely dedicated to the proposition that every child deserved the best education possible, not only for himself but for the good of the nation. Just as significantly, he recognized the close relationship between the quality of the country's educational system and its economic health and sought to build up the nation's educational foundation. Moreover, Johnson's legislative achievements in education are consistent with his campaign promises and with policy statements stretching back into his career as Senate Majority Leader. Lyndon Johnson's sucessful efforts to secure educational legislation gave birth to a dramatic shift in the focus of educational policy making in the United States and resulted in an expansion of the educational system in terms of both goals and

constituentcies. After 1965, the federal government was a direct participant with state and local governments in educational decision making.[48] Not even the so-called "Reagan Reversion" of the 1980's was able to significantly reverse the trend. For good or ill, Lyndon Johnson cast a long shadow over public education in the United States.

How did the President assess his own influence? Reflecting in 1971 on his administration's record of achievement in education Johnson wrote:

> To my mind, the outstanding significance of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was that it established a foundation on which the country could work toward eduational achievement, with equal quality and opportuinity for the future. Old fears of federal enchroachment were disappearing and that law hastened the process. We were in a position to get on with work too long delayed.
>
> Altogether, we passed sixty education bills. All of them contributed to advances across the whole spectrum of our society. When I left office, millions of young boys and girls were receiving better grade school educations than they once could have acquired. A million and a half students were in college who otherwise could not have afforded it. Thousands of adult men and women were enrolled in classes of their choice, available to them for the first time.....
>
> There are many things that remain to be done, but looking back on those years of feverish activity between 1963 and 1969, I find deep satisfaction in recalling what was done and what was initiated....[49]

Self-congratulatory hyperbole? Perhaps. But Lyndon Johnson was remarkably successful in translating his beliefs about education into law and in providing both moral and political leadership in educational policy matters.

But perhaps it was Hubert Humphrey, long time senatorial colleague and Johnson's Vice President, who had the clearest insight into the President's real contribution to educational reform. Humphrey summed it up this way:

> I think it's true that he overestimated what education could do, because, to break through, you have to have total committment....That's what Johnson did, he broke through...he got the federal government involved in education. ...Johnson was a door opener. That's really what he was. He didn't rearrange all the furniture. He didn't put up all the drapes. He didn't paint the walls. But he got in the house, and that's what's important.[50]

Lyndon Johnson believed that by expanding educational opportunity for all Americans he could both improve the quality of life for individual citizens and contribute to the strengthening of the nation economically and militarily. With the clarity of hindsight, we may dismiss the long-term effectiveness of many of his programs. But we must accept the sincerity of his belief. For good or ill, Lyndon Johnson kept his campaign promises and transformed the nation's educational system for the next thirty years.

Notes

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5. Quoted in Merle Miller, Lyndon: An Oral Biography. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980, p. 407.

6. Douglass Cater, Oral History, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

7. Rulon, The Compassionate Samaritan; William C. Pool, Emmie Craddock & David E. Conrad, Lyndon Baines Johnson: The Formative Years. San Marcos: Southwest Texas State College Press, 1965; Alfred E. Steinberg, Sam Johnson's Boy: A Close Up of the President from Texas. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968. In a note in The Vantage Point p. 219n, Johnson makes the following comment: "My determined efforts on behalf of education bills were stimulated and inspired by Mrs. Agnes E. Meyer, an old friend who, I believe, did more to influence me on federal education measures than any other person." Mrs. Meyers was the widow of Eugene Meyer, owner of the *Washington Post* and Johnson supporter.

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33. Papers of the President, Book 1, No. 414, "Remarks at the Dedication of a New University of California Campus at Irvine", June 20, 1964.

34. Papers of the President, Book 1, No. 488, "Remarks to a Group of State and Local Officials", July

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35. Papers of the President, Book 1, No. 601, "Remarks in Providence at the 200th Anniversary Convocation of Brown University", September 28, 1964.

36. Papers of the President, Book 1, No. 658, "Remarks at the Coliseum in Denver", October 12, 1964.

37. Papers of the President, Book 1, No. 754, "Presidential Policy paper No. 1: Education", November 1, 1964.

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politics of the act, focusing on the shift in power away from southern Democrats and conservative Republicans to northern and western Democrats in the 1964 election and on the efforts of presidential aides, especially Francis Keppel, to build the coalitions necessary to passage of the act. Edith K. Mosher,"The Origins, Enactment and Implementation of the E.S.E.A. of 1965: A Study of Emergent *National Educational Policy*", *unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1969*, concluded that passage of ESEA represented a watershed in educational policy making after which the political balance between the federal government and the state and local governemnts were never the same. Finally, Eugene Eidenberg & Roy D. Morey, An Act of Congress: The Legislative Process and the Making of Educational Policy. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969, concluded that changes brought about by the election of 1964 accompanied by shifts in position by major professional groups and associations created a climate in which the passage of a major federal aid to education act was possible. For a critical view of ESEA's effectiveness in helping poor children, see Marian Wright Edelman, "Title I of ESEA: Is It Helping Poor Children?" in Warner, Toward New Human Rights, pg. 341-361.

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48. Bailey & Mosher, ESEA; Campbell et. al. The Organization and Control of American Schools.

49. Johnson, The Vantage Point, pg. 219 & 221.

50. Quoted in McCoy, The Education President, p. 217.